



TITLE:

Attempt to identify the origin of Ms. CHI. YI.  
26 [Ms. CHI. 80] of Bibliothèque  
Interuniversitaire des Langues Orientales,  
Paris

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CITATION:

Iwasa, Kazue. Attempt to identify the origin of Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80] of Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire des Langues Orientales, Paris. Proceedings of the 51st International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics 2018: 28.

ISSUE DATE:

2018-09

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/235282>

RIGHT:

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Attempt to identify the origin of Ms. CHI. YI.  
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Interuniversitaire des Langues Orientales,  
Paris

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# 0. Introduction

## 0.1 Basic information of Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80] of BIULO\*

- One of the Yi manuscripts preserved in \*Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire des Langues Orientales (BIULO), in Paris.
- Yi-Chinese bilingual manuscript, which is hardly found both inside and outside China except Huayi-Yiyu (华夷译语).
- This is not only partially translated in Chinese but also transcribed by Chinese characters.

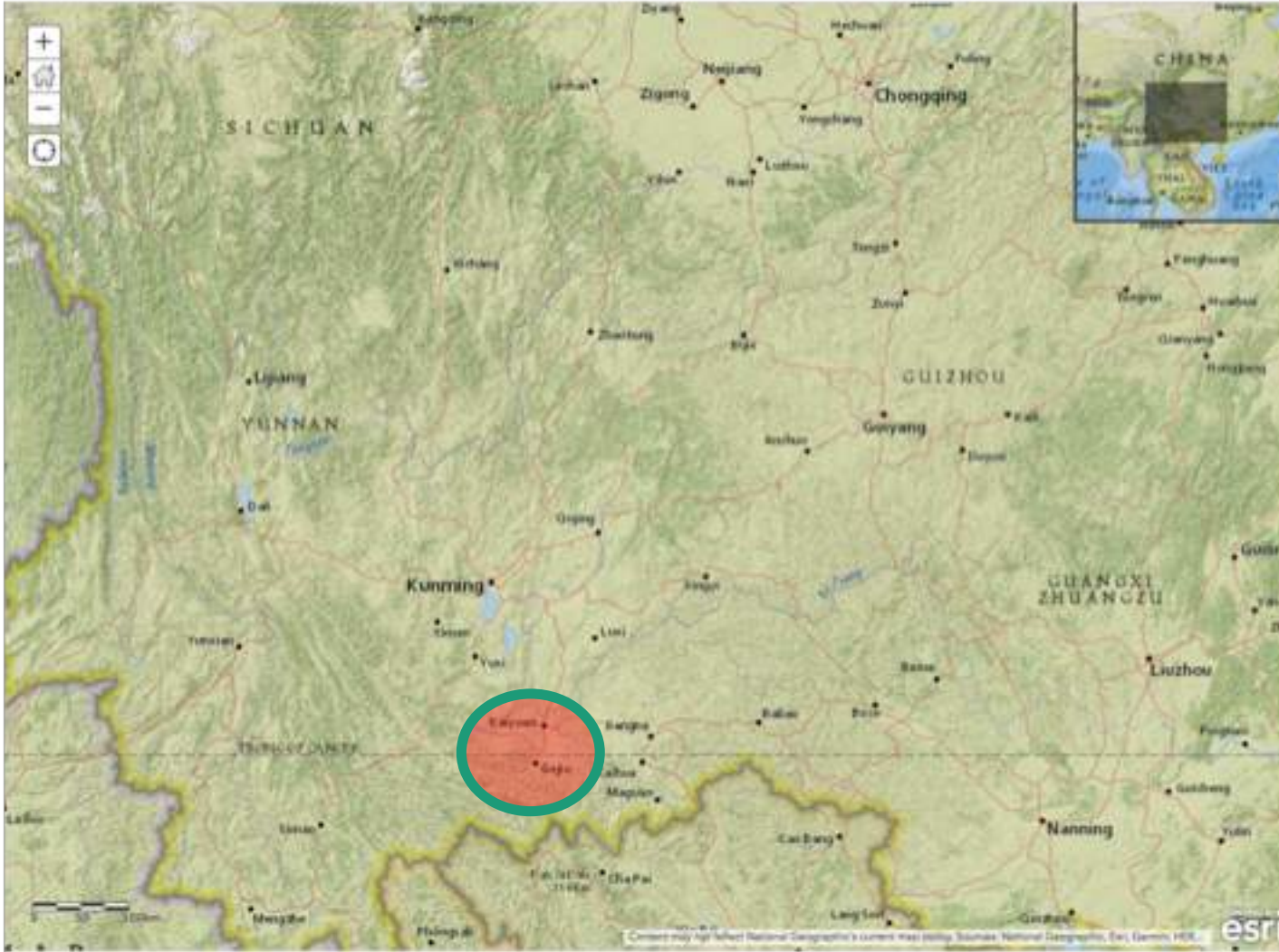
## 0.2 Main findings in Iwasa (2008)\*

- The Yi language written in this manuscript: Nisu (尼苏) , the Southern dialect according to the official classification in China, although in the inventory it was classified as Yi de l'est, namely the Eastern Yi, Nasu.
- The content: an allegory of a vicious woman called Mrs Xian-Zheng.
- The style: a pentasyllabic poetry style.
- Several differences from other Nisu manuscripts: more Chinese-like punctuation (。 ) and calligraphic handwriting (书法) than other Nisu manuscripts.

## 0.3 Summary of this presentation

- This presentation will show you a very possible origin of this gripping bilingual manuscript and several assumptive phonetic values of the Yi characters:
  - by comparing the shape and pronunciation of the Yi characters of this manuscript with those from the data of my field work and Yi character maps.
  - by considering what kind of Chinese is used for the transcriptions, namely vernacular or standard Chinese (普通话).

## 0.4 The Yi ethnic group and their language



- The Yi ethnic group live in the southwest part of China, and the northern part of Vietnam and Laos.
- The Yi language (彝语) belongs to the Lolo-Burmese language group of the Tibeto-Burman language family.
- The red circle signifies the possible area where this manuscript originated.

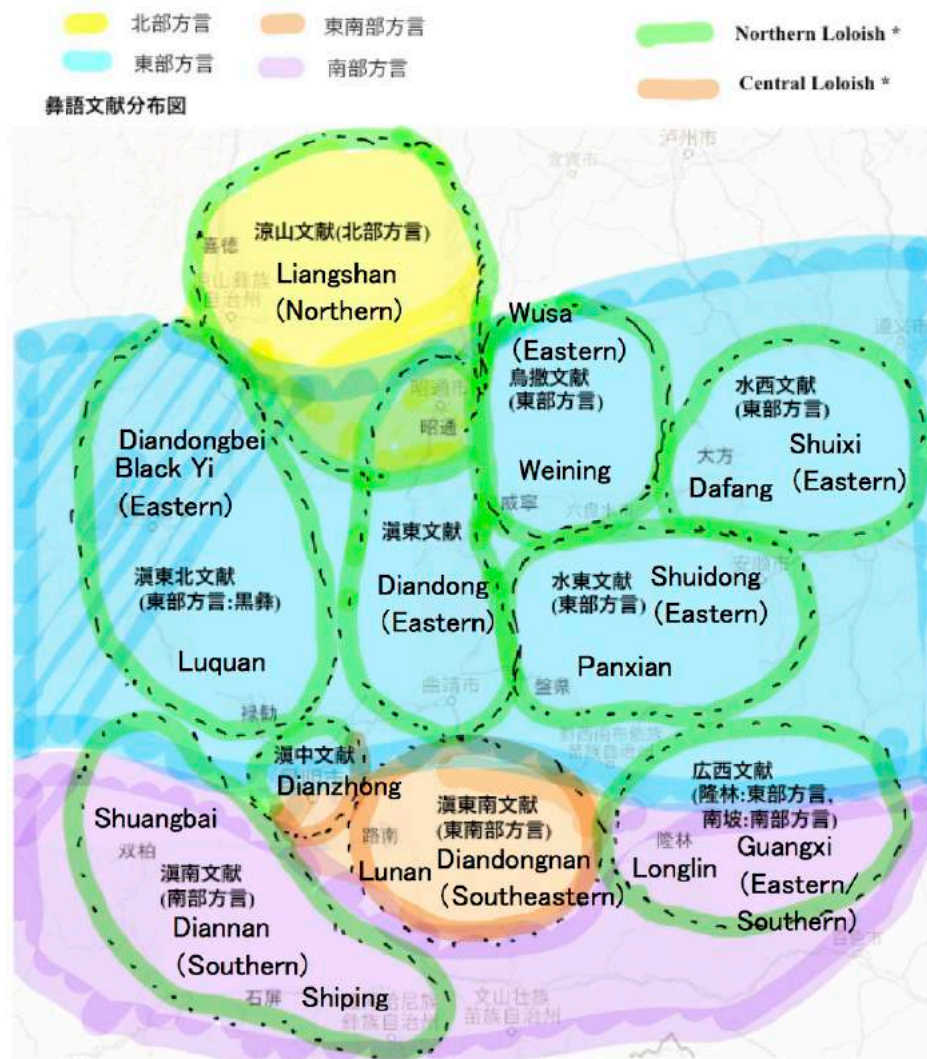
## 0.5 The Yi manuscripts and Bimo



- Bimo(s): religious leaders of Yi people, who deal with Yi characters and manuscripts.



## 0.6 Basic information of Yi characters



- Yi characters: in the process of transition from logographic to syllabographic system.
- Very personal and exclusive writing system: many phonetic loans and allographs
- Huge dialectal difference

# 1. Geolinguistic approach to the Yi characters of Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80]

- Supporting its affiliation with Nisu from a geolinguistic perspective

## 1.1 The format of Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80]

天之下也 地之上也  
目土季得克 命業季長肯  
亡以和盈可。 中近和尔...  
神聖之所言 知者听之  
神諭聖明阿 哥薩恒糯農  
四非七姓阿。 女才了出山。  
善言善語 肯听肯學者  
明能阿哥格潘你潘農的 目  
旺开予... 乙太乙山令。

- The rightmost lines are translations in Chinese of Nisu Yi.
- The middle lines are transcriptions by Chinese characters of corresponding Nisu Yi characters.
- The leftmost lines are Nisu Yi sentences.

## 1.2.1 Geolinguistic support for its affiliation with Nisu

1.天



Line 3                      2                      1                      Row

天 目 天 1

- Sky:
  - An identical character is found in the Southern dialect area (around 石屏), although a similar one is also found around Luquan (禄劝), the Eastern dialect.
  - What its transcription “目(mù)” can indicate seems very similar to the actual data [mu<sup>33</sup>] as shown on the map.

## 1.2.2 Geolinguistic support for its affiliation with Nisu



Line	3	2	1	Row
	中	命	地	6

- Earth:
  - Identical or similar characters are found in Shiping (石屏) and Shuangbai (双柏).
  - Taken the transcription “命 (mìng)” and the actual pronunciation in Shiping [mi<sup>55</sup>] into consideration, it is highly possible to say this Yi character is typical in the Southern dialect.

## 1.2.3 Geolinguistic support for its affiliation with Nisu



Line	3	2	1	Row
	可	克	下	5

- Below:
  - As the data shows, identical or similar characters are only found in the Southern dialect area, around Shiping.
  - The pronunciation suggested by “克 (kè)” is similar to [khu<sup>55</sup>] of the southern dialect.


## 1.2.4 Geolinguistic support for its affiliation with Nisu



Line	3	2	1	Row
	𠂔	𠂔	𠂔	10

- Above:
- An identical or similar character is only found around Shiping, the Southern dialect.
- What “𠂔 (kěǎn)” can express is similar to [khɛ<sup>55/21</sup>] of the Southern dialect.

## 1.3 Possible area of the origin of Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80]

- The character signifying “sky” is written like , and pronounced [mu<sup>33</sup>] in the southern dialect.
  - Whereas the identical character is pronounced as [ɕi<sup>33</sup>] and means “to die” or “death” in the Eastern dialect as indicated in the inventory of BIULO before.
- Geolinguistic data also show the Yi language written in this manuscript belongs to the Southern dialect or Nisu, as other characters demonstrated in this presentation are also typically found in the Southern dialect.



2. Investigation into the phonetic values of the Yi characters

- By analysing their Chinese transcriptions

## 2.1 What kind of Chinese would these transcriptions be based upon?

- When phonetic values of the Chinese characters used for the transcriptions are investigated, some of them seem to be used without considering any distinctive features such as retroflex and alveolar.
- Phonetic representations of some Chinese characters appear incompatible with those of the standard Chinese (普通话).
- The Chinese used for the transcriptions may be vernacular one, but precisely of which part in Yunnan?

## 2.1 What kind of Chinese would these transcriptions be based upon?

- As a result of the geolinguistic analyses and my field work in Jianshui, Yunnan, China in 2008, it is certain that the manuscript, Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80], originated from the Southern Yi dialect (Nisu) area in Yunnan.
- There are striking features found among the Chinese transcriptions.
  - “疑” initial
  - Retroflex vs Alveolar
  - “影” initial
  - /-y/ voewl

## 2.2. “疑” initials

- 


- This Yi character means ‘black’, and it is pronounced as [n̥e<sup>33</sup>] or [n̥e<sup>33</sup>].
- Its transcription 業 (yè) is pronounced as [ie<sup>51</sup>] in standard Chinese.
- In the Southwestern Mandarin spoken in Yunnan, “疑” initials are generally pronounced with /n-/.

## 2.2. “疑” initials

- 二

- This Yi character means ‘two’, and it is pronounced as [ɲi<sup>21</sup>].
- Its transcription 宜 (yí) is pronounced as [i<sup>35</sup>] in standard Chinese, while in the Southwestern Mandarin spoken in Yunnan, “疑” initials are generally pronounced with /n-/.

## 2.2. “疑” initials

- 
- This Yi character means ‘heart’, and it is pronounced as [ɲi<sup>33</sup>].
- There are two transcriptions : 宜 (yí) [i<sup>35</sup>] and 你 (nǐ: 娘 initial) [ni<sup>214</sup>].
- The phonetic value of this Yi character and these two transcriptions obviously indicate that in this Chinese language 疑 initials should be pronounced with /n-/ initial. That is, this manuscript must have been written in the Nisu region in Yunnan.

## 2.3 Retroflex vs Alveolar

- 𪛗

- This Yi character means ‘to listen’, and it is pronounced as [dzo<sup>33</sup>] in Shiping.
- Its transcriptions: “中 (zhōng)” and “摠 (zǒng)”.
- 中: 諭 Standard Chinese [tʂoŋ<sup>55</sup>]  
Jianshui, Shiping and Yuanyang [tsoŋ<sup>55/44</sup>]
- 摠: Standard Chinese [tsoŋ<sup>214</sup>]  
Jianshui, Shiping and Yuanyang [tsoŋ<sup>33</sup>]
- No distinction between retroflex and alveolar in the transcriptions.

- In the manuscript, it seems that there is no distinction between retroflexes and alveolars.
- Jianshui (建水), Shiping (石屏) and Yuanyang (元阳), the retroflex initials have merged into alveolar ones.
  - ts-, tʂ- > ts- ; tsh-, tʂj- > tsh-
  - ʂ- > s- ; ʐ- > z-

## 2.3 Retroflex vs Alveolar



- This Yi character means ‘world, place’, and it is pronounced as [dzɛ<sup>21</sup>].
- Its transcriptions: 正 (zhèng [tʂon<sup>51</sup>]), 軫 (zhěn [tʂən<sup>214</sup>]) and 曾 (zēng [tʂən<sup>55</sup>]), in Jianshui, Shiping and Yuanyang the initials have been merged into the alveolar series.
- No distinction between retroflex and alveolar in the transcriptions.



## 2.3 Retroflex vs Alveolar


- When there are two transcriptions for a single Yi character, then one is retroflex and another is alveolar, this implies that the writer of this manuscript must be a speaker of vernacular Chinese, especially in Jianshui, Shiping or Yuanyang, because around there these two initials are not distinctive, more precisely, these two series of initials have been merged into alveolar one.
- All Yi characters transcribed by the retroflexes are all pronounced as alveolar in the Nisu language which I have researched.

## 2.4 merger of /y/ vowels into /i/

- 

- This Yi character means ‘word, language’, and it is pronounced as [vi<sup>55</sup>] in Shiping.
- Its transcription: “諭(yù) [y<sup>51</sup>]”.
- In Jianshui and Yuanyang, /y/ vowels have merged into /i/.
- The assumptive phonetic value of the Yi character has /i/ vowel.

## 2.4 “影” initials

- 
- This Yi character means ‘man, son’, and it is pronounced as [zo<sup>33</sup>].
- Its transcription: “約(yu) [yuē<sup>55</sup>]”.
- In Yuanyang, 影 initials are pronounced as /z-/.

# 3. Conclusion

- In this presentation:
  - The geolinguistic approach has firmly supported the fact that the Ms. CHI. YI. 26 [Ms. CHI. 80] of BIULO originated from the Southern Yi, Nisu, as proven in Iwasa (2008).
  - Its possible origin has been narrowed down to the Yuanyang area by means of geolinguistic approach and investigation into the pronunciations of the Chinese characters used for the transcriptions in this manuscript.

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